

## Response to the draft Programme for Government, 2024-2027, “Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most.”

### Who we are

Theatre and Dance NI (TDNI) is the sole representative professional membership organisation for theatre and dance in Northern Ireland (NI) with key goals to connect, support development and advocate for our members and the industry.

Our vision is of a healthy, animated society, where people want to live, work and visit, thriving with excellent theatre and dance opportunities for all to experience, delivered professionally by artists and all our workers who are valued and supported to deliver world-standard and diverse artistic experiences to the public.

Our 300 members include independent workers such as facilitators, performers, directors, technicians, producers, designers, playwrights, venues, production companies, festivals, amateur and youth drama and dance groups.

### General comments

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the draft Programme for Government **2024-2027, Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most**, but we are disappointed at the lack of recognition of the role of the Culture, Arts and Heritage (CAH) sectors in the draft plan.

Theatre and Dance NI were members of both CAH Ministerial Taskforces established in 2020 and in 2022-3 and our members informed and engaged in this work. The CAH sectors were recognised as key drivers and “enablers of equality, inclusion, and social and economic change”. (*A Way Forward*, Department for Communities, (DFC), 2022). Announcing the strategy development process, the then Minister recognised the contribution of these sectors:

“Even a brief examination of activities direct and catalytic contribution in areas such as mental health and well-being; tackling educational underachievement; tourism; wider economic and industrial/sectoral innovation; reengagement with training and employment; volunteering; good relations, racial equality, cultural identity and expression; attracting inward investment; High Street regeneration; addressing rural isolation; tackling violence against women and girls; and supporting sustainable

development and practices as part of green growth and climate change action.”

More recently, the current Communities Minister, acknowledged the role that people and organisations working across heritage and the arts have made in terms of quality of life here, and their “important and practical role across the range of Executive priorities and policies, “directly and indirectly” to the economy, tourism, improving productivity; and driving our digital, screen and other industries.

“Across health and well-being, they add real value in prevention, mitigation and treatment. They are ubiquitous across education, child-care and youthwork; and crucial cornerstones in our communities in place-making, in peacebuilding, and in helping us all to understand our past and each other. When equality of access and opportunity remove barriers to participation, the arts and heritage can also be key drivers for building community cohesion and supporting individuals to realise their aspirations and reach their potential (Written Ministerial Statement - Heritage, Culture and Creativity, a Strategic Approach to Protect, Support and Celebrate Our Culture, Heritage and the Arts, DFC, 2024)

The Programme for Government will establish government priorities during this mandate and inform budget allocations. It is critical that our sectors’ role and contribution is more clearly articulated and more consistently referenced across the draft plan.

Our member organisations, artists and workers are embedded within and across communities in Northern Ireland and are a vital part of the overall infrastructure delivering across the areas of health, economy, education, peacebuilding as well as culture. Their work and contribution are invaluable in providing solutions and inspiration for policy makers at all levels of government and a bank of evidence and research is available to support this assertion.

### **Some key facts**

The arts and culture sector makes a significant contribution to the NI economy. In the financial year 2018-19 arts events across Northern Ireland generated over £24million in ticket revenue. Further ancillary spend was estimated at an additional £90million, contributing over £110million to the local economy. The DFC has recognised that “prosperous economies are characterised by a strong creative sector and the creative industries are recognised across the globe for their potential for wealth and job creation”. Furthermore, the broader creative industries are emerging as one of the fastest growing and increasingly important sectors of the NI economy.

The NI creative industries generate over £1.3bn in Gross Value Added for the NI economy (3.1% of NI GVA). GVA for music, performing and visual arts in 2018 and 2019 increased by 40%.

The creative industries sector employs 33,000 people, representing 3.9% of NI employment. There are c. 3,500 creative businesses in NI (3.8% of all businesses).

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland report into the living and working conditions of artists estimate that 14,500 people work as artists in Northern Ireland.

Participatory arts and arts organisations working in communities support individuals to gain social capital and skills, knowledge and experience through social and emotional learning (SEL). According to the World Economic Forum, these are critical to help young people secure work or start new businesses in the 21st century.

4m tourists visiting NI per year engage with the arts and culture here. In 2013, more than 1 million people visited Derry-Londonderry as UK Capital of Culture. £400m of all spending by NI visitors in 2018 involved engagement with arts and culture. Festivals and events in NI create a return of £7 for every £1 of public investment, attracting visitors, participants and tourists, increasing dwell-time and spending.

Northern Ireland's theatre and dance sector is vibrant and internationally renowned. and our artists are well known on the world stages and screens.

## **Conclusion**

We recognise that the NI Executive has a range of competing and urgent priorities, However, the revised draft PFG should include and recognise the central role of the arts, culture and heritage sectors. The long-term disinvestment in these sectors has undermined their current ability and is limiting the future potential of these sectors.

There is clear evidence from our neighbours and across the world which shows what can be achieved from investing to realise such potential. It is investment which recognises the intrinsic value of culture, arts and heritage, and the significant additional impacts and returns which deliver for people, the planet and for prosperity.

The NI Executive needs to champion and invest in the CAH sectors and all Departmental Ministers should recognise and value the key contribution these sectors make to their departmental priorities and to the well-being of society. We urge them to be as ambitious as the Scottish, Irish and Welsh Governments and other governments globally who recognise the contribution, potential and possibilities of arts and culture in their programmes for government, strategies, policies and plans alongside relevant investment.

**Theatre and Dance NI would welcome further discussion on any of the points raised in this response.**

**4th November 2024**